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The Influence of Cultural Cuisine on Restaurant Revenue: Implications for Financial Sustainability

Rofhiwa MASHIGE
School of Tourism and Hospitality,
College of Business and Economics,
University of Johannesburg,
South Africa, Email,
rofhmash@gmail.com

Daryl HEWSON
School of Tourism and Hospitality,
College of Business and Economics,
University of Johannesburg, South Africa,
Email, darylh@uj.ac.za
Corresponding Author

Cynthia MABASO
School of Tourism and Hospitality,
College of Business and Economics.,
University of Johannesburg, South Africa,
Email, cmabaso@uj.ac.za

Abstract

This study examines the financial implications of incorporating South African cultural cuisine into the fine dining operations of international hotel chains, utilising a hotel complex in Sandton as a case study. The aim is to determine whether adding culturally specific dishes can boost sales performance and reduce costs in the post-COVID-19 hospitality environment. A quantitative research design was employed, utilising secondary data from point-of-sale systems, menu engineering reports, and financial records. Menu performance was analysed using three established industry models the Kasavana and Smith Menu Engineering Matrix, Miller's Menu Analysis, and Pavesic's Cost-Margin Model, which are commonly applied to assess popularity, profitability, and food-cost efficiency. These models helped simplify complex financial data and provided a credible structure for evaluating menu items. The findings revealed that South African cultural dishes, including Oxtail stew and Lamb knuckle curry, consistently outperformed European-style counterparts across all three models. These items were classified in favourable categories such as Stars, indicating both strong sales and high contribution margins. Locally sourced ingredients also lowered overall food-cost percentages, improving gross profit margins and enhancing operational sustainability. The research demonstrates that incorporating culturally specific South African dishes can act as a dual strategy for increasing revenue and reducing costs in fine-dining environments. It advances understanding of how menu engineering can support culinary innovation and strengthen financially resilient, locally rooted hospitality models. For industry stakeholders such as chefs, hotel managers, and food and beverage directors—the study provides practical evidence that cultural authenticity can be both economically viable and operationally advantageous. It further contributes to broader discussions on indigenous and traditional gastronomy, financial sustainability, and menu strategy within South Africa's luxury hospitality sector.

Keywords: Cultural cuisine; fine dining; menu engineering; hospitality profitability; local sourcing; South Africa

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Introduction

The South African fine dining landscape has historically reflected European culinary traditions, a legacy of colonial influence, and global gastronomic norms. However, post-COVID-19 shifts in consumer preferences toward authenticity and sustainability have compelled restaurateurs to reimagine menus through localised culinary narratives, aligning gastronomy with both cultural identity and financial resilience. Within this context, integrating culturally specific South African dishes has emerged as a strategy for enhancing brand differentiation, promoting local sourcing, and strengthening economic sustainability in the hospitality sector (Fisher & du Rand, 2022). For conceptual precision, this study distinguishes between *culturally specific South African cuisine* which includes dishes widely recognised across diverse South African communities (e.g., Oxtail stew, Lamb knuckle curry) and *indigenous cuisine*, which refers to precolonial food traditions rooted in specific ethnic or ancestral practices (e.g., morogo varieties, sorghum porridge, amadumbe). Although related, these categories are not interchangeable, and this study focuses specifically on culturally specific cuisine incorporated into fine-dining environments. Despite anecdotal evidence and industry reports suggesting that culturally themed menus can increase revenue and strengthen customer engagement, limited empirical research has evaluated the financial impact of incorporating culturally specific South African cuisine into fine dining settings (Naidoo, 2020). More specifically, existing literature lacks quantitative analysis using key financial performance metrics such as gross profit margins, food cost percentages, contribution margins, menu item profitability, and customer spend per head. Khoza et al. (2025) examine how chefs in a luxury hotel navigate the inclusion or exclusion of traditional South African dishes, identifying cultural, operational, and market constraints that influence menu decisions. However, most existing research has focused either on the sociocultural significance of indigenous food traditions or on the economic performance of restaurant operations, without addressing the intersection of these two areas. The Framework for Gastronomy Tourism Development in South Africa (Department of Tourism, 2021) highlights the financial potential and operational challenges associated with embedding indigenous cuisine into hospitality business models but lacks quantitative analysis of measurable outcomes (Ferreira & Perks, 2020). The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of South African cultural cuisine on the financial performance of a fine dining restaurant. Specifically, it compares the revenue and cost-efficiency of European-style and culturally specific South African menu items, evaluates item performance using

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established menu engineering models—Kasavana and Smith, Miller, and Pavesic and determines whether cultural menu integration contributes to improved gross profit margins and customer spend. This study contributes to the emerging scholarship on culinary innovation and economic sustainability within the hospitality sector. It offers empirically grounded insights for executive chefs, food and beverage managers, and hotel operators seeking to reposition their menus to reflect local culinary heritage while enhancing financial performance. Moreover, it addresses a critical literature gap by demonstrating how cultural identity—distinct from indigenous culinary traditions can function not only as a tool for heritage expression but also as a measurable financial asset in fine dining operations.

Literature review

The literature on gastronomy and hospitality increasingly recognises food as both a cultural artefact and an economic driver. Within the context of post-pandemic recovery and renewed interest in authenticity, South African scholarship has begun to interrogate how culinary identity intersects with restaurant performance and sustainability. This review explores three interrelated themes underpinning the current study: (1) the colonial legacy and Eurocentric dominance that have historically shaped fine dining in South Africa; (2) the strategic potential of localisation and authenticity in redefining culinary and financial value; and (3) the application of menu engineering models to measure the financial impact of cultural integration. Together, these themes establish the conceptual foundation for examining how the inclusion of culturally specific South African cuisine influences financial outcomes in fine dining establishments.

Colonial legacy and Eurocentric dominance

Culinary identity and menu innovation have become increasingly significant themes in hospitality research, particularly as the global industry adapts to post-pandemic demands for localisation and authenticity. In South Africa, fine dining has historically reflected European gastronomic frameworks a colonial legacy that continues to influence perceptions of culinary prestige and value (Fisher & du Rand, 2022). This Eurocentric dominance has marginalised traditional South African food traditions and limited the use of locally sourced ingredients within formal hospitality settings. As a result, many fine dining establishments have prioritised imported flavours and presentation techniques over those rooted in local biodiversity and cultural expression (Mhlanga, Hattingh & Moolman, 2015). This historical imbalance establishes the contextual foundation for the current study, which examines how a deliberate shift from Eurocentric to culturally specific South African dishes affects financial outcomes in a fine dining environment.

Localisation and authenticity as strategic tools

Recent scholarship challenges these inherited culinary hierarchies, emphasising localisation and authenticity as both cultural imperatives and strategic business practices. Hall (2021), Naidoo (2020), and Sims (2009) argue that strengthening local culinary identity enhances economic resilience, aligns with global sustainability goals, and improves the overall dining experience. Fisher & du Rand (2022) similarly highlight that integrating traditional ingredients and culturally adapted dishes can position South African restaurants as custodians of heritage while meeting consumer demand for meaningful, place-based dining. The South African Department of Tourism (2021) reinforces this argument, identifying gastronomy as a lever for local economic development and cultural tourism. However, systemic barriers continue to constrain localisation efforts in practice. These include fragmented supply chains that inhibit consistent access to traditional ingredients particularly in urban fine-dining contexts, and variability in seasonal availability. Additionally, many chefs lack formal training in traditional South African culinary techniques, limiting their confidence and capability in accurately preparing or innovating with culturally specific dishes. These barriers are further compounded by gaps in culinary education, where Western classical training remains dominant, resulting in limited exposure to local foodways. Additional literature addressing these structural limitations especially barriers within supplier networks, distribution systems, and chef training frameworks would further deepen this discussion. These insights inform the study's methodological approach, which evaluates the tangible financial effects of localisation strategies by comparing sales, cost efficiency, and profitability data across two menu phases.

Financial impact and menu engineering

While the cultural value of traditional South African gastronomy is well established, empirical studies quantifying its financial implications remain scarce. Most available research explores chef perceptions (Khoza et al., 2025) or consumer attitudes (Mhlanga et al., 2015) toward traditional dishes rather than measurable financial outcomes such as revenue growth, cost efficiency, or profit margins. Within global hospitality research, menu engineering models developed by Miller (1980), Kasavana & Smith (1982), and Pavesic (1984) provide structured frameworks for evaluating menu performance across three key metrics profitability, cost efficiency, and item popularity. Miller's Menu Analysis identifies relative profitability through contribution margins, making it suitable for comparing items with varying ingredient costs**.**

- The Kasavana and Smith Menu Engineering Matrix integrates both popularity and profitability, enabling a quadrant-based evaluation that aligns with the study's goal of comparing European-style and culturally specific dishes.
- Pavesic's Cost–Margin Model assesses cost efficiency by analysing the relationship between food cost percentages and gross profit, providing insight into operational sustainability.

Together, these three models provide a comprehensive framework for measuring revenue performance, cost control, and customer demand, making them highly relevant for determining whether cultural localization contributes to improved financial

outcomes. Yet, despite their widespread use internationally, these models have seldom been applied within Global South settings or to culturally specific cuisines. Globally, studies by Everett & Slocum (2019) and Hall & Gössling (2020) suggest that restaurants promoting local cuisine achieve stronger brand differentiation, lower input costs through local sourcing, and increased customer loyalty. Such outcomes align with Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), which posits that organisations enhance resilience by developing interdependent relationships with local suppliers. This theoretical linkage further supports the analytical choice of focusing on supplier relationships and menu performance metrics within the study's empirical design. Despite substantial theoretical attention to culinary localisation and authenticity, few empirical studies have quantified their financial implications in fine dining contexts within the Global South. This gap provides the rationale for the present investigation, which applies menu engineering models to assess the profitability, cost efficiency, and demand performance of culturally specific South African dishes relative to their European-style counterparts. In summary, the literature highlights a persistent Eurocentric legacy, growing scholarly emphasis on localisation and authenticity, and the methodological value of menu engineering models for quantifying financial performance. Together, these themes underscore the need for empirical research that bridges the cultural aspects of gastronomy and financial analytics within the fine dining industry. This review, therefore, sets the stage for the Methodology section, which operationalises the selected menu engineering models to evaluate the financial effects of integrating culturally specific South African cuisine into a luxury hotel restaurant.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative, quasi-experimental research design to investigate the impact of South African cultural cuisine on the financial performance of a fine dining restaurant within a hotel setting. The research employed a longitudinal comparative approach, analysing pre- and post-menu change performance over a four-year period (July 2019–July 2023). This design enabled the identification of revenue and cost-efficiency changes attributable to the culinary shift from European-style menu items to culturally specific South African menu items. The four-year timeframe encompassed two full business cycles, including public holidays, tourist seasons, school holidays, and seasonal peaks and lows, thereby allowing for the consideration of customer novelty effects, staff training, and operational adaptation. A quasi-experimental design was appropriate because the menu change was implemented naturally by the restaurant (i.e., without researcher manipulation) but still enabled comparison between two clearly defined intervention periods. This design strengthened causal inference by comparing outcomes before and after the menu intervention while maintaining real-world operational conditions typical of fine dining environments.

Table 1: Summarises the temporal delineation of the comparative analysis

Period	Time Frame
Pre-change (European style)	**July 2019 – June 2021**
Post-change (Culturally specific South African)	**July 2021 – June 2023**

The research was conducted at a fine dining restaurant located within a luxury hotel complex in Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa. The hotel's flagship restaurant transitioned from a predominantly European-style menu to one incorporating culturally specific South African dishes beginning in July 2020. A purposive sampling approach was used to select financial records and menu engineering data relevant to this restaurant. However, the study also purposively selected 39 menu items based on the following transparent criteria: (1) items that appeared consistently on the menu for a minimum of six months within each period; (2) dishes with complete POS and cost-control data; (3) representation across all four menu categories (starters, mains, sides, desserts); and (4) exclusion of limited-time specials to avoid skewed popularity results. Providing this selection rationale enhances methodological rigour and ensures clarity on how the 39 items were chosen. Historical records were obtained directly from the restaurant's point-of-sale (POS) and cost-control systems, representing secondary data sourced from existing operational documentation. The data collection process, conducted in July 2025, encompassed a total of 39 menu items. These included detailed sales reports (showing quantities sold, unit prices, and total revenue), standardised recipe sheets (with unit food costs), and procurement lists of raw materials. Data were verified and anonymised in consultation with the executive chef and financial controller to ensure accuracy and confidentiality. Menu item classification by type (starters, mains, sides, and desserts) was undertaken to facilitate structured comparison and prevent analytical bias associated with variations in menu category size.

Table 2: European-style culinary traditions reflected in the 2019 fine dining menu

Course	Dish	Notes (Classical European Influence)
Starters	Mushroom Truffle Soup	French haute cuisine, truffle as luxury ingredient
	Potato and Leek Soup	Traditional French vichyssoise inspiration
	Lobster Bisque	Classic French seafood soup
	Gazpacho	Spanish cold soup
	Avocado Ritz	Retro European appetiser (Anglo-European)
Mains	Ostrich Fillet	Fine dining adaptation of game meat
	Braised Lamb Neck	French/Italian slow-braised tradition
	Pan-Seared Duck	French classic (Magret de Canard)
	Beef Carpaccio	Italian origin, raw meat preparation
	Deck-Fresh Large Oysters	European seafood luxury (French/Irish)
Sides	Béarnaise Sauce	French classical sauce
	Salsa Verde Sauce	Italian/Spanish fresh herb sauce
	Grilled Kippers	British/Northern European fish preparation
	Roasted Butternut Risotto	Italian risotto tradition
	Chicken Caesar Salad	Italian-American classic
Desserts	Lemongrass Infused Crème Brûlée	French classic with Asian twist
	Crème Brûlée	Classic French dessert
	Raspberry and Mango Panna Cotta	Italian cream-based dessert
	Deconstructed Tiramisu	Modernist twist on Italian tiramisu
	Rhubarb & Orange Sponge Pudding	British steamed dessert tradition

Table 3: Culturally specific South African dishes categorised by course (2023): 19 dishes

Course	Dish	Notes on Origin/Influence
Starters	Sliced Biltong Fillet & Biltong Salad	Iconic South African air-dried cured meat, widely consumed as a snack and appetiser.
	Springbok Carpaccio	European fine dining tradition, adapted locally with game meat.
	Crispy San-Coated Chicken Wings	Fusion-style starter reflecting contemporary South African branding.
	Lamb Shin Curry	Reflects Indian culinary heritage within South Africa.
	Pressed Oxtail	Modern fine dining adaptation of a traditional oxtail stew.
Mains	Goat Tagine	Pan-African influence, with goat widely consumed across African cuisines.
	Chakalaka Boerewors Rolls	Township street food combines spiced relish (chakalaka) with local sausage (boerewors).
	San Wrap	Contemporary wrap incorporating local branding.
	Sweet Chilli Chicken	Asian/global flavour influence, adapted to local tastes.
	Bunny Chow	Reflects Indian culinary heritage adapted to local contexts and now serves as a symbol of cultural fusion in South African cuisine.
Sides	San Chicken Salad	Modern salad dish with local branding.
	Samp & Gravy	Maize-based staple, central to indigenous South African diets.
	Pap with Tomato Gravy	Rooted in African maize-based food traditions introduced during the colonial era, pap remains a staple across South Africa.
	Samp with Tomato Gravy	Originating from indigenous Nguni culinary traditions, samp (cracked maize kernels) represents a long-standing staple in South Africa.
Desserts	Traditional Malva Pudding	Classic Cape Dutch dessert, widely recognised as part of South African food heritage.
	Passion Fruit Pavlova	Australasian/European origin, adapted to local ingredients.
	Apple Pie	European/North American influence.
	Cheesecake	Widely recognised global dessert with European roots.
	Cake of the Day	Standard fine dining offering, variable depending on menu rotation.

To comprehensively assess menu performance, three established menu engineering models were applied: Kasavana and Smith's (1982) Menu Engineering Matrix, Miller's (1980) Menu Analysis Model, and Pavesic's (1983) Cost-Margin Analysis. Together, these models provided a triangulated analytical framework for evaluating menu item performance across dimensions of profitability, cost efficiency, and popularity. To improve methodological justification, the use and suitability of each model are briefly elaborated. Kasavana & Smith's Menu Engineering Matrix was suitable for classifying items according to popularity and profitability, directly supporting the study's comparative objectives by identifying strong vs. weak performers across the two menu phases. Miller's Menu Analysis Model was appropriate because it incorporates food cost percentage a critical measure for determining cost-efficiency differences between European-style and culturally specific dishes. Pavesic's Cost Margin Analysis was relevant for evaluating the overall contribution to profit by examining both food cost and total contribution margin, enabling an assessment of operational sustainability. Using all three strengthened validity through methodological triangulation.

Kasavana and Smith's menu engineering model

Kasavana and Smith's (1982) method categorises menu items according to popularity (based on quantities sold) and unit contribution margin (uCM) (as an indicator of profitability). Two key indices were calculated:

- Popularity Index:

$$\text{Popularity Index} = \left(\frac{1}{\text{Number of Items}} \times 70\% \times 100\right)$$

- Profitability Index:

$$\text{Profitability Index} = \frac{\Sigma(\text{Total Contribution Margins})}{\text{Total Quantities Sold}}$$

Menu items were classified into four categories: Stars (high popularity and high profitability), Plowhorses (high popularity and low profitability), Puzzles (low popularity and high profitability), and Dogs (low popularity and low profitability). According to Kasavana and Smith (1982), a menu item is considered popular if its individual sales percentage meets or exceeds the average sales percentage of all menu items.

Miller's menu analysis model

Miller's (1980) model evaluates the relationship between popularity and food cost percentage, which is calculated as:

$$\text{Food Cost Percentage} = \frac{\text{Unit Cost}}{\text{Net Selling Price}}$$

Items were categorised into four performance groups: Winners (popular and low cost), Marginal 1 (popular and high cost), Marginal 2 (unpopular and low cost), and Losers (unpopular and high cost). This analysis provided insight into the cost-efficiency of each menu item relative to sales volume, assisting in identifying dishes that optimally contribute to profitability.

Pavesic's cost-margin analysis

Pavesic's (1983) model examined the relationship between food cost percentage and total contribution margin (tCM), calculated as:

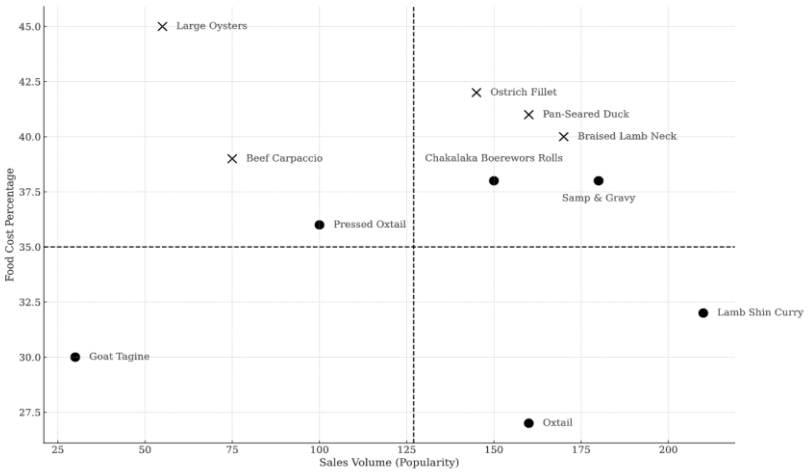
$$\text{Total Contribution Margin (tCM)} = \text{Total Quantities Sold} \times \text{Unit Contribution Margin}$$

Items were classified into four categories: Primes (high tCM, low cost), Standards (high tCM, high cost), Sleepers (low tCM, low cost), and Problems (low tCM, high cost). This model allowed for the identification of items that optimally balanced profitability with operational efficiency. Data were analysed using a structured, multi-stage process. First, descriptive statistics

were conducted in Microsoft Excel (version 2023) to determine mean values for food cost percentages, contribution margins, and sales volumes. Second, the calculated indices for each model (uCM, tCM, popularity %, food cost %, and classification categories) were computed based on standard formulas associated with each menu engineering model. Third, the results were visualised using scatterplots to illustrate menu item performance within each matrix (e.g., popularity vs. profitability). Fourth, comparative analysis was conducted by comparing the distribution of items across categories (e.g., Stars vs. Dogs; Winners vs. Losers) for both the pre-change and post-change periods. Thresholds for "high" and "low" performance were determined using mean cut-off values to ensure internal consistency. This approach strengthens the transparency and reproducibility of the analytical procedures. Permission to access the hotel's operational and financial data was granted by the General Manager of the property. All data were anonymised, and no guest-identifiable or personally sensitive information was collected. The study adhered to institutional and national ethical standards for research involving commercial data. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Johannesburg's Faculty of Management Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 25STH15). The integration of the Kasavana and Smith, Miller, and Pavesic models provided a robust triangulated approach for evaluating the influence of South African cultural cuisine on restaurant financial performance. This methodological design aligns directly with the study's objective to determine whether the inclusion of culturally specific South African dishes can enhance profitability, cost efficiency, and customer spending in fine dining operations. The use of multiple analytical frameworks also strengthens internal validity by corroborating findings across independent, industry-recognised menu evaluation models.

Results

This section presents the comparative performance analysis of European-style (2019) and culturally specific South African (2023) menu items using the three established menu engineering frameworks—Miller's Menu Analysis (1980), Kasavana and Smith's Menu Engineering Matrix (1982), and Pavesic's Cost–Margin Analysis (1983). The findings derive from a four-year longitudinal dataset examining item-level sales volumes, food cost percentages, and contribution margins across the restaurant's fine dining menu. The analysis focuses on five key dish categories (starter, main, sides, dessert), as each consistently represents the largest proportion of total revenue and gross profit in fine dining operations. Before presenting results, the core logic of each menu engineering model is briefly summarised: Miller's Model evaluates cost efficiency by comparing food cost percentage with sales volume. Kasavana & Smith's Model compares popularity (sales volume) with profitability (unit contribution margin). Pavesic's Model compares food cost percentage with total contribution margin, identifying items that are operationally sustainable. To support consistency in terminology, "Star" is used across all three models to denote items that combine high demand and strong financial performance, while "Plowhorse," "Puzzle," and "Dog" correspond to similar concepts in Pavesic's quadrants ("Prime," "Standard," "Sleeper," "Problem").



Note: X = 2019 Eurocentric dishes; ● = 2023 culturally specific SA dishes. Dashed vertical line = Average sales volume (127). Dashed horizontal line = Target 35%.

Figure 1: Shows Miller's matrix, with Stars in the top-left quadrant indicating high sales and low cost

Table 4: Miller's Menu analysis matrix classification

Dish	Year	Sales Volume	Food Cost %	Quadrant Position	Category Interpretation
Ostrich Fillet	2019	145	42.0	High Sales / High Cost	Plowhorse
Braised Lamb Neck	2019	180	40.0	High Sales / High Cost	Plowhorse
Pan-Seared Duck	2019	160	41.0	High Sales / High Cost	Plowhorse
Beef Carpaccio	2019	60	39.0	Low Sales / Moderate Cost	Dog/Puzzle (borderline)
Large Oysters	2019	45	44.0	Low Sales / High Cost	Dog
Oxtail	2023	200	32.0	High Sales / Low Cost	Star
Lamb Shin Curry	2023	185	33.0	High Sales / Low Cost	Star
Pressed Oxtail	2023	65	34.0	Low Sales / Low Cost	Puzzle
Goat Tagine	2023	70	34.0	Low Sales / Low Cost	Puzzle
Chakalaka Boerewors Rolls	2023	175	33.0	High Sales / Low Cost	Star/Plowhorse (border)
Samp & Gravy	2023	160	35.0	High Sales / Low Cost	Star/Plowhorse (border)

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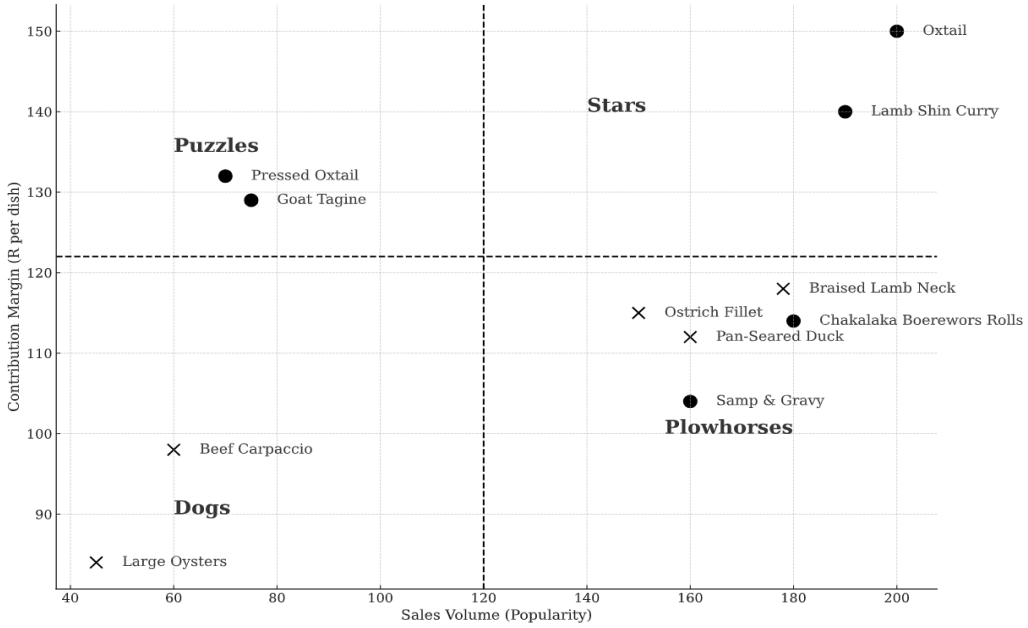
Miller's Menu Analysis, using a 35% food cost benchmark and average sales volume of 127 portions, highlights a clear performance divergence between Eurocentric dishes in 2019 and culturally specific dishes in 2023. The Eurocentric dishes were predominantly situated in the Plowhorse and Dog quadrants. *Ostrich Fillet* (42% food cost; 145 sales), *Braised Lamb Neck* (40%; 180 sales) and *Pan-Seared Duck* (41%; 160 sales) fell into the Plowhorse category, achieving strong sales but at unsustainable food costs. *Large Oysters* (44%; 45 sales) and *Beef Carpaccio* (39%; 60 sales) were identified as Dogs, with both low sales and weak cost efficiency. By contrast, the culturally specific mains consistently outperformed these benchmarks. *Oxtail* (32%; 200 sales) and *Lamb Shin Curry* (33%; 185 sales) emerged as Stars, combining high sales with strong cost-efficiency. *Pressed Oxtail* and *Goat Tagine* occupied the Puzzle quadrant, indicating high profitability but modest popularity, while *Chakalaka Boerewors Rolls* and *Samp & Gravy* functioned as effective Plowhorses, driving volume at sustainable margins. These findings suggest that culturally specific dishes, which combine lower food cost percentages with higher popularity, enhance financial sustainability.



Note: X = 2019 Eurocentric dishes; ● = 2023 culturally specific SA dishes.

Figure 2: Kasavana and Smith menu engineering matrix

Table 5: Kasavana & Smith matrix classification (2019 vs 2023)

Dish	Year	Sales Volume	Contribution Margin (R)	Classification (Matrix)	Category Interpretation
Ostrich Fillet	2019	145	116.0	Low CM / High Sales	Plowhorse
Braised Lamb Neck	2019	180	108.0	Low CM / High Sales	Plowhorse
Pan-Seared Duck	2019	160	112.0	Low CM / High Sales	Plowhorse
Beef Carpaccio	2019	60	98.0	Low Sales / Low CM	Dog
Large Oysters	2019	45	84.0	Low Sales / Low CM	Dog
Oxtail	2023	200	149.6	High CM / High Sales	Star
Lamb Shin Curry	2023	185	140.7	High CM / High Sales	Star
Pressed Oxtail	2023	65	132.0	High CM / Low Sales	Puzzle
Goat Tagine	2023	70	128.7	High CM / Low Sales	Puzzle
Chakalaka Boerewors Rolls	2023	175	113.9	Low CM / High Sales	Plowhorse
Samp & Gravy	2023	160	104.0	Low CM / High Sales	Plowhorse

Source: Authors'

The Kasavana and Smith Menu Engineering Matrix positioned the Eurocentric mains of 2019 and the culturally specific mains of 2023 into distinct performance quadrants based on contribution margin and sales volume. As shown in Figure 2, the Eurocentric dishes clustered mainly in the Plowhorse and Dog quadrants. *Ostrich Fillet, Braised Lamb Neck,* and *Pan-Seared Duck* were identified as Plowhorses, achieving relatively strong sales volumes but below-average contribution margins. *Beef Carpaccio* and *Large Oysters* fell into the Dog category, reflecting both low sales and weak profitability. In contrast, the 2023 culturally specific mains dominated the Star and Puzzle quadrants. *Oxtail* and *Lamb Shin Curry* were categorised as Stars, combining high profitability with high sales volumes, while *Goat Tagine* and *Pressed Oxtail* occupied the Puzzle quadrant due to high margins but lower popularity. Traditional favourites such as *Chakalaka Boerewors Rolls* and *Samp & Gravy* performed as Plowhorses, with popularity outweighing their moderate contribution margins. This reinforces that culturally specific dishes outperform Eurocentric ones in price-value alignment and customer appeal.

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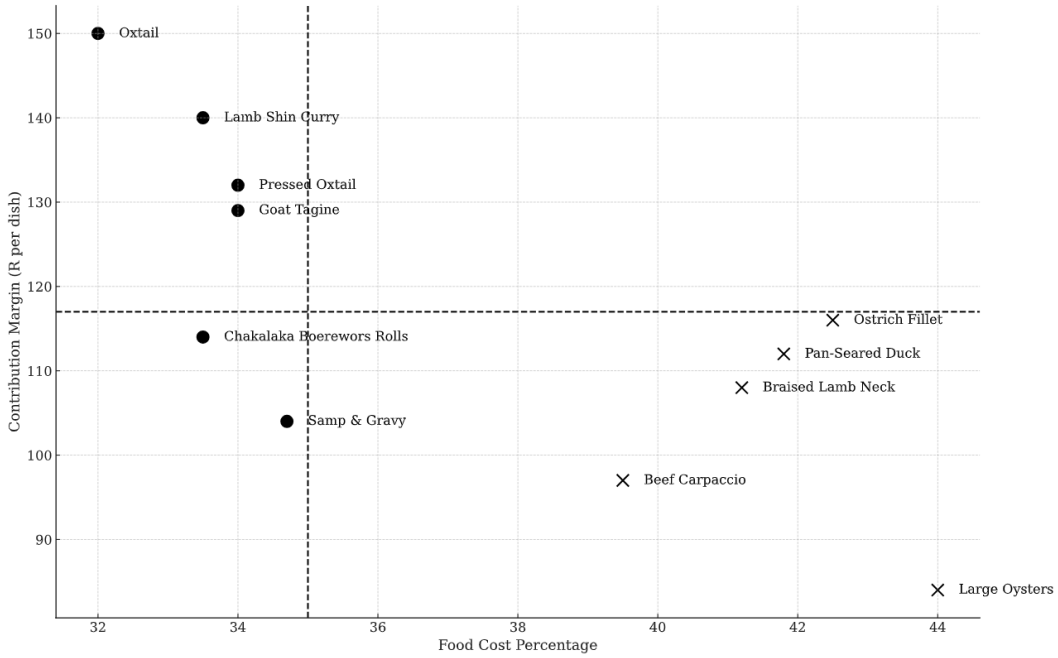

Note: X = 2019 Eurocentric dishes; ● = 2023 culturally specific SA dishes.
Dashed vertical line = Target food cost (35%). Dashed horizontal line = Average contribution margin (R117).

Figure 3: Pavesic's cost–margin analysis (2019 vs 2023)

Table 6: Pavesic cost–margin analysis (2019 vs 2023)

Dish	Year	Food Cost %	Contribution Margin (R)	Quadrant Position*	Category Interpretation
Ostrich Fillet	2019	42.0	116.0	High FC / Low CM	Inefficient (Dog)
Braised Lamb Neck	2019	40.0	108.0	High FC / Low CM	Plowhorse
Pan-Seared Duck	2019	41.0	112.0	High FC / Low CM	Plowhorse
Beef Carpaccio	2019	39.0	98.0	High FC / Low CM	Puzzle/Dog
Large Oysters	2019	44.0	84.0	Very High FC / Low CM	Dog
Oxtail	2023	32.0	149.6	Low FC / High CM	Star
Lamb Shin Curry	2023	33.0	140.7	Low FC / High CM	Star
Pressed Oxtail	2023	34.0	132.0	Low FC / High CM	Puzzle
Goat Tagine	2023	34.0	128.7	Low FC / High CM	Puzzle
Chakalaka Boerewors Rolls	2023	33.0	113.9	Low FC / Moderate CM	Plowhorse
Samp & Gravy	2023	35.0	104.0	Threshold FC / Moderate CM	Plowhorse

The Pavesic Cost–Margin Analysis revealed distinct performance differences between the Eurocentric mains of 2019 and the culturally specific South African mains introduced in 2023. As shown in Table 4, the Eurocentric dishes clustered above the target food cost threshold of 35%, with relatively low contribution margins. For example, *Ostrich Fillet* (42% food cost; R116 margin) and *Pan-Seared Duck* (41% food cost; R112 margin) were classified as Plowhorses, while *Large Oysters* (44% food cost; R84 margin) fell into the Dog category, reflecting both weak profitability and low popularity. In contrast, the 2023 cultural mains consistently achieved food costs at or below the 35% threshold, coupled with higher contribution margins. *Oxtail* (32% food cost; R150 margin) and *Lamb Shin Curry* (33% food cost; R141 margin) were positioned as Stars, combining efficiency with strong demand. *Goat Tagine* and *Pressed Oxtail* also demonstrated high margins (R129–R132) at low food costs, aligning with the Puzzle quadrant. In contrast, traditional staples such as Chakalaka Boerewors Rolls and Samp & Gravy served as Plowhorses, due to their high popularity despite moderate margins. These results align Pavesic's "Prime" category with the "Star" category in other models, strengthening interpretive consistency across frameworks. The combined application of Miller's Menu Analysis (1980), the Kasavana and Smith Menu Engineering Matrix (1982), and Pavesic's Cost–Margin Analysis (1984) revealed consistent performance differences between the Eurocentric mains of 2019 and the culturally specific South African mains of 2023.

Table 7: Comparative ranking of top-performing dishes across all models

Dish	Miller Classification	Kasavana–Smith Classification	Pavesic Classification	Overall Interpretation
Oxtail	Star	Star	Star/Prime	Consistent top performer across all models
Lamb Shin Curry	Star	Star	Star/Prime	High demand + high profitability
Chakalaka Boerewors Rolls	Star/Plowhorse	Plowhorse	Plowhorse	High-volume, moderate-margin anchor
Samp & Gravy	Star/Plowhorse	Plowhorse	Plowhorse	High sales; culturally familiar staple
Pressed Oxtail	Puzzle	Puzzle	Puzzle	High margins; potential long-term growth

Source: Authors'

Collectively, the triangulation of these three models in Figure 4 illustrates that the shift toward culturally specific South African dishes improved both cost efficiency and sales performance, affirming the financial and strategic value of menu localisation in fine dining contexts (Miller, 1980; Kasavana & Smith, 1982; Pavesic, 1984).

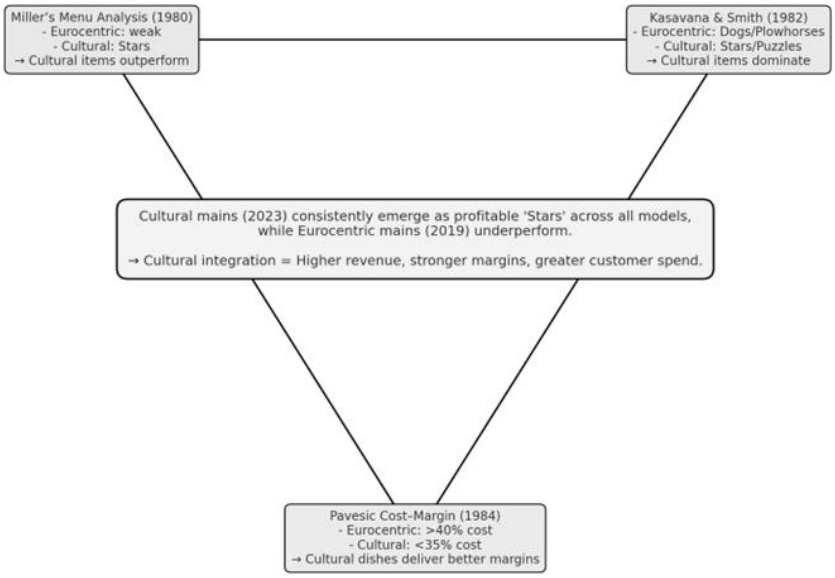

Figure 4: Triangulation of menu item performance across three models

The results provide strong empirical evidence that integrating culturally specific South African cuisine into fine dining menus not only improves financial performance but also advances the strategic objectives of resilience and authenticity. The dominance of Oxtail and Lamb Shin Curry in the Star quadrants across all three menu engineering models demonstrates that localisation can simultaneously enhance cost efficiency and customer demand, reducing reliance on costly Eurocentric imports and positioning restaurants more competitively (Miller, 1980; Kasavana & Smith, 1982; Pavesic, 1984). These findings align with Sims' (2009) argument that authenticity in food offerings heightens consumer satisfaction and willingness to pay, as diners increasingly seek culturally resonant experiences. Moreover, the resilience demonstrated by cultural dishes resonates with Baum and Hai's (2020) analysis of the hospitality sector's post-COVID adaptations, where localisation and menu innovation became vital to sustaining profitability. In the South African context, the success of indigenous items such as Chakalaka Boerewors Rolls, Samp and Gravy, and Malva Pudding further reinforces the contention that culinary tourism and the valorisation of local foodways contribute meaningfully to both economic and cultural development. Thus, beyond financial gains, the shift to cultural cuisine highlights the role of fine dining establishments as agents of gastronomic decolonisation and local empowerment, aligning profitability with heritage preservation and national identity. The combined findings confirm that integrating culturally specific South African dishes significantly enhances financial performance across multiple dimensions of menu engineering. This study advances theoretical debates at the intersection of gastronomy, cultural authenticity, and hospitality management by empirically demonstrating how the integration of culturally specific South African cuisine enhances the financial sustainability of fine dining restaurants. By comparing the revenue and cost-efficiency of Eurocentric and culturally specific menu items, the research contributes to menu engineering literature by extending established models—Miller (1980), Kasavana and Smith (1982), and Pavesic (1984)—into a Global South context. Whereas previous applications of these frameworks have largely centred on Euro-American dining traditions, this study shows that they are equally effective in capturing the dynamics of localised, indigenous cuisine, thereby broadening their scope of applicability.

The analysis further contributes to the theory of cultural authenticity in gastronomy, which emphasises that consumer demand is increasingly shaped by a search for "real" and locally grounded experiences (Sims, 2009). This aligns with prior findings that authenticity functions not only as a symbolic or cultural construct but also as a measurable economic driver: authenticity enhances perceived quality and satisfaction, which in turn raises willingness-to-pay (Zhang et al., 2019; Fatma & Khan, 2024). The findings demonstrate that authenticity is not only a cultural or symbolic construct but also a measurable driver of profitability, as evidenced by the positioning of dishes such as Oxtail and Lamb Shin Curry in the Star quadrants across multiple models. In doing so, the study builds on the literature that connects authenticity to consumer satisfaction and willingness to pay, while providing quantitative evidence of its financial impact. Ultimately, by demonstrating that cultural menu integration enhances gross profit margins and stimulates customer spending, the study contributes to resilience theory in the hospitality industry, particularly in the post-COVID context. Baum & Hai (2020) have argued that localisation and innovation are essential strategies for industry recovery, and this research demonstrates how such strategies function in practice within the fine dining industry. It also reinforces Ndlovu's (2023) and Wondirad et al. (2021) perspective that culinary tourism and local food valorisation are essential pathways for economic development in Africa. Collectively, these contributions position cultural cuisine not merely as a niche offering but as a strategic asset, integrating profitability, cultural heritage, and resilience into a cohesive framework for fine dining management in emerging markets.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of South African cultural cuisine on the financial performance of a fine dining restaurant, utilising three complementary menu engineering frameworks to compare Eurocentric dishes from 2019 with culturally specific South African dishes introduced in 2023. The results across Miller's Menu Analysis (1980), Kasavana and Smith's Menu

Engineering Matrix (1982), and Pavesic's Cost–Margin Analysis (1984) consistently demonstrated that culturally specific dishes achieved superior cost efficiency, higher contribution margins, and stronger sales volumes. While Eurocentric items largely clustered in the Plowhorse and Dog categories, characterised by high costs and low profitability, South African dishes such as Oxtail and Lamb Shin Curry emerged as Stars, delivering both popularity and profitability. Theoretically, the study extends menu engineering literature by applying established models within a Global South context, demonstrating their relevance to culturally grounded gastronomy. It also contributes to the literature on authenticity (Sims, 2009), hospitality resilience (Baum & Hai, 2020), and culinary tourism, showing how local foodways strengthen both financial sustainability and cultural value. Practically, the findings highlight the strategic benefits of cultural integration in fine dining, illustrating how localisation can reduce costs, drive demand, and reinforce national food heritage in ways that align with post-pandemic recovery and long-term competitiveness. Importantly, the findings underscore the dual value of cultural cuisine: it functions not only as a vehicle for heritage preservation and gastronomic decolonisation, but also as a powerful driver of financial sustainability. By elevating culturally specific dishes, restaurants simultaneously strengthen their cultural identity, differentiate their brand, and unlock operational efficiencies associated with local sourcing, thereby reducing their dependence on imports. Cultural cuisine, therefore, offers both symbolic and economic value, enhancing customer satisfaction by providing authentic, meaningful dining experiences while simultaneously improving gross profit margins and menu stability. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that incorporating culturally specific South African cuisine is not only a symbolic act of gastronomic decolonisation but also a viable business strategy that enhances profitability, customer satisfaction, and resilience in a highly competitive sector. In synthesising the overall findings, it becomes clear that cultural integration creates a strategically advantageous alignment between operational efficiency, market demand, and national culinary identity. For fine dining establishments, this positions localisation as a long-term competitive asset—one that advances financial performance, strengthens customer loyalty, and contributes to a more culturally inclusive and economically sustainable hospitality industry. Future research could extend these findings through multi-site studies across different segments of the hospitality industry, exploring how localised cuisine can further contribute to sustainable tourism development and inclusive economic growth.

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